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ABSTRACT

Cultural development of modern countries in the East, including the Republic of Kazakhstan, is a complicated and contradictory process, where common cultural ways were shaped differently and specifically in the countries. Common historical fate has influenced this development and given these countries some common problems, but there is some progress and new ideas are replacing the post-colonial way of thinking. One of the most important and distinct features of the modern world is the infinitely expanding ability of information suppliers. Information serves for communication, learning, a means of controlling society, and a weapon allowing some cultures to dominate others. The info-cultural space is an area whose borders do not match geographical, political, or economic borders of the modern world. The West has the necessary technical resources to easily penetrate info-cultural borders not protected by any laws or conventions. One defense of third world countries to aggression in this sphere is religion, especially in the most concentrated, aggressive form of traditionalism: fundamentalism. Kazakhstan has legislative measures to limit foreign participation in mass media. Special measures must be taken to protect the national info-cultural space. They should be worked out by government and non-governmental organizations. Each country's distinct culture must be given all the opportunities to develop and flourish. (YLB)

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Crossroads of the New Millennium

Informational And Cultural Situation In Developing Countries

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Workshop 1

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Abstract

The cultural development of the modern East countries, including the Republic of Kazakhstan, is a complicated and contradictory process, where the common cultural ways were shaped differently and specifically in different countries. Nevertheless, the common historical fate influenced this development and gave these countries some common problems to solve.

There are traits of colonial rule in the cultures of eastern countries: lack of self-confidence, turning to the former rulers or "elder brothers" and the endless repetition of the well-known refrain. Of course, there is some progress and the post-colonial way of thinking is slowly and gradually replaced by new ideas.

One of the most important and distinct features of the modern world is the infinitely expanding ability of information suppliers. Information may serve now not for only communication and learning but also as a means of controlling the society. It can become the strongest weapon that allows some cultures to dominate others. The information determines the taste, views and behaviour of the consumer.

There is often a sense of prejudice or disrespect towards the people who live and think in another way. This sense can appear in news and reports without notice but it affects people very efficiently.

The info-cultural space is an area whose borders do not match geographical, political or economic borders of the modern world. The only possible limitations are the technical capabilities and low-level communication means. The info-cultural space is not only the sphere where the information and culture spread, but also the arena for meeting and interaction, sometimes peaceful and sometimes not, of different national traditions, ideas, values, types of art and ways of thinking; everything that is included in the term "national culture".

The idea of info-cultural space has come into our life recently with the development of satellite broadcasting, video dubbing and filling the market with the mass culture production. Of course, we are talking about the mass culture of the West and mainly the USA, who have all the necessary resources to invade the minds and souls of people, especially the young.

The info-cultural borders are very easily penetrable, as they are not protected by any laws and conventions. The aggression in this sphere exists also between the technically developed countries of the West, but they have a strong defense: their own mass media, rich literary traditions, well-financed cultural institutions.

As for the third world countries, one of their ways of defense is religion, especially in the most concentrated, aggressive form - traditionalism, fundamentalism, which offer to preserve the national religion traditions and dignity. Some legislative measures have already been taken in Kazakhstan which determine the 50% of national language broadcasting, but they are not enforced. Besides, their national security law prohibits foreign participation exceeding 20% in mass media. But also a great role must belong to the balance between the information sources in order to avoid the domination of the West. The mass media must help and spread different cultures and views, and not to serve as a weapon of the strongest.

Special measures must be taken to protect the national info-cultural space. They should be worked out by both government and non-governmental organisations and should be assisted as much as possible. Each country's distinct culture must be given all the opportunities to develop and flourish and this must be the scientifically developed common strategy for developing countries.

We do not vote for cultural isolation, but we think that the interaction must be equal and must only enrich cultures, leaving the choice of life to everyone.

Informational and Cultural Situation in Developing Countries

The world has come through many changes in recent decades and one of them was the collapse of the USSR as a superpower, which signaled an end to the competition of two major political and ideological poles and the breakdown of the socialist bloc. These changes had an effect strong enough to speak about the shift to a New World outlook on its contemporary evolution stage. A whole period in our civilisation's history is completed and probably the world is now accepting a certain new system of communication and existence. And all the spheres of people's activity – politics, economics, ideology, culture - are going to be effected by these changes. What we are going to witness is an intense transformation of the human way of thinking, consciousness and intellect.

The cultural development of the modern East countries, including the Republic of Kazakhstan, is a complicated and contradictory process, where the common cultural ways were shaped differently and specifically in different countries. Nevertheless, the common historical fate influenced this development and gave these countries some common problems to solve.

The former immovable Soviet "monolith" has been replaced by a fragmented structure combining various components, some of which, including the Central Asian states (Kazakhstan, Kyrghyzstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan), tend to belong to the Southern side in the "North-South" resistance scheme. South – not in a geographical sense but an economical one, because unfortunately all these countries, during the previous 70 years, were used as a base for raw materials, the industry of which was exploited.

That's why all these states were closely connected to the centre and depended on it. It was also a big agricultural region and its production was of great importance for all the superpowers.

Only now we can realise how irrational this division was, because by interrupting economical links with other countries and mainly with Russia, many regional factories and plants closed down and unemployment escalated to high levels.
An unstable economy gives birth to an unstable society, unstable in all its spheres and, of course, culture.

Actually we had no time to be conscious of ourselves, of what we are, what kind of people we are, what our place in the changing world is, what our possibilities and our limits are.

When the euphoria of the newly-acquired sovereignty passed, in 1991, we suddenly realised that nothing changed, we were the same in our minds and in our souls. The same dependence on Russia existed, be it cultural, economical, or political. And for our dreams of independence to come true we need to rebuild ourselves, our mentality, our way of thinking.

There are still traits of communist rule in the cultures and ideology of Central Asian countries: lack of self-confidence, turning to the former rulers or "elder brothers" and the endless repeating of the well-known refrain and slogans. Of course, there is some progress now and the long-existing way of thinking is slowly and gradually being replaced by new ideas. But one of the most important things, which I wish you to know, is that when I say "Russia" I don't mean Russian people. Perhaps it would be better to say "Moscow" or "Kremlin" because we are not against Russia as a land. Our conflict hasn't any national or ethnic features. It deals with the contradiction between the old system, the communist party dictates and the new society, the new system of relations, the new ideas and ways of thinking.

Probably, Russian people have suffered from this historical experiment no less than others have but, speaking for my country, I must say there is no hatred towards Russia and Russian people. All of us were victims.

Besides that, the demographic situation is such that until 1998 the number of Russians in Kazakhstan was estimated at about 46%, while the number of Kazakhs, the original population, was about 42-43%. And in such a situation saying that one half the population hated or hates the other half is absolute nonsense.

Many of our professionals and academic staff were educated in Russia. They joined its culture, literature, language, and feel grateful for it. Even now, despite the active emigration process, the number of Russians staying in Kazakhstan approaches 40%. Many of them don't want to leave the country because they feel it is their motherland.

Returning from the demographic situation to the current informational and cultural situation, I should say that among the most important and distinct features of the modern world are the infinitely expanding abilities of information suppliers. Information may serve now not just for communication and learning but also as a means of controlling society. It can become the

strongest weapon, which allows some cultures to dominate others. The information determines the taste, the views and the behaviour of the consumer.

There is often a sense of prejudice or disrespect towards the people who live and think in another way. This sense can appear in news and reports without notice but it affects people very efficiently.

The info-cultural space is an area whose borders do not match geographical, political or economic borders of the modern world. The only possible limitations are the technical capabilities and low-level communication means. The info-cultural space is not only the sphere where the information and culture spread, but also the arena for meeting and interaction, sometimes peaceful and sometimes not, of different national traditions, ideas, values, types of art and ways of thinking; everything that is included in the term "national culture".

I think it is possible to divide Central Asian states into two groups. The first, being a more closed type or closed society, in my opinion, consists of Uzbekistan, Tadjikistan, Turkmenistan. In terms of cultural attitude, these states, even during the Soviet period, were more conservative and traditional than others. They preserved religiousness, probably because the number of villagers was much more numerous than the urban population. Of course there are some other reasons, historical, geographical, for example. But I want to confess that formerly, this conservatism and traditionalism seemed to be a great shortcoming. Now, I am not so sure anymore.

The second group, in which I include Kazakhstan and Kirghizstan, is a group of open type societies, who are active in the acknowledgement of Russian or foreign cultures and information and unfortunately, as a result, lose rapidly their national identity and national culture. Therefore, being excessively open or being excessively closed – both of these situations are equally dangerous.

With the first group of states, taking into consideration their evident relation with the East, their spiritual, religious, geographical intimacy and close connections with Islamic states such as Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan, it is possible in general to strengthen Islam, but in its most fundamentalist, aggressive form. (There were some events and incidents which support this opinion, for example attempts to kill Uzbek president, some military operations in Tadjikistan mountains and others).

Everybody has a right to make a choice of their own course of development, the only criteria is the well being of people. As for our country and Kirghizstan, we can observe a tendency towards relations with the North and West.

Of course I can't say that this division of Central Asian states is already fulfilled, not at all, there is only a potential tendency. But the informational and cultural situation in Kazakhstan today is very disturbing and there are reasons for us to be disturbed. Unfortunately, we have to state that for some Eastern countries, seeking to enter world civilisation, have effected their society's intellectual degradation by new information schemes and mass culture which allow them to manipulate society, and hence turn it into an obedient mass. Through worldwide mass media, their population is becoming subject to Western modernisation projects, ideas and value systems, which result in the destruction of the foundation of local traditional culture and irreversible change in national mentality. The "price" of accessing the achievements of modern technological civilisation is the impoverishment of humanity's cultural foundations. Objectively, the society shifting from the traditional to modern forms does not have to follow the Western patterns and view the Western culture as an ideal type. The society can be "modern" in terms of economics, science and technology without becoming westernised in cultural terms. Self-identity is not an ideology of anti-westerners and traditionalists, but a natural conviction in one's social and cultural significance, distinction and self-efficiency. The self-identity theory admits the necessity of modernisation, but with the preservation of a distinct culture. Self-identity means first of all defining the differences, distinctions, of what distinguishes one people from another, makes them special, particular, and original. Plunging into the depth of their own culture, history, language, and understanding and admitting those traditions and customs which don't hinder general progress, could be compared to vaccination during childhood, or receiving immunity to dangerous diseases.

The idea of info-cultural space has come into our life recently with the development of satellite broadcasting, video dubbing and filling the market with mass culture production. Of course, we are talking about the mass culture of the West and mainly the USA, who have all the necessary resources to invade the minds and souls of people, especially the young. Dialogue and interaction are replaced by the massive attack of technical media that can be compared to mass destruction weapons in terms of efficiency.

The info-cultural borders are very easily penetrable, as they are not protected by any laws or conventions. The aggression in this sphere exists also between the technically developed countries of the West, but they have a strong defense: their own mass media, rich literary traditions and well-financed cultural institutions.

As for developing countries, it would probably be an exaggeration to say that the consumer orientation, of Western kind, has conquered all of them. Traditional oriental values still hold strong in some countries of the Near and Far East, South and Central Asia, where we can observe the spontaneous or intentional combination of traditional and modern lifestyles; their organic synthesis. Although, only countries with strong religious and cultural foundations can oppose the destruction of local culture, probably, the most successful example of transformation of an oriental society under Western influence is Japan, though it is not developing but a developed country. The state here provides and guarantees the effectiveness of all structures and elements. Japan became a capitalist country like Europe, but it remained Japan. Having outstripped European countries in many spheres, it remained an oriental country. Obviously, those traditions hindering the transformation of the society were changed and the others remained the same.

As for Kazakhstan, unfortunately we have to say that it does not have that strong religious and cultural foundation as in the countries of the Far East. As early as during the Soviet period, our republic's distinctive feature was its easy reaction to any external influence and readiness to become subject to any of Moscow's experiments, such as destruction of pastures in order to provide the whole country with grain or using the country's territory as a place of exile for criminals or whole nations in the period of repression, creation of military and aerospace bases, nuclear tests etc. Qualities of Kazakh national character, such as gentleness and trustfulness and the fact that other nationalities began to outnumber them, led to the replacement of the Kazakh language by Russian, national traditions were almost gone, and the religiousness of the people was not significant even before 1917. Official culture was regulated, unified, typically "Soviet", although some national elements continued to exist (some crafts, folksongs, poetry).

With independence, it seemed the situation would change. The party dictate and censoring disappeared. There was an opportunity to reconstruct the history, the national legacy, which was almost lost. At the same time the authorities, including the President declared Kazakh's

intention to enter the world community, build a democratic society similar to Europe, and redefine the country's place on the world's geopolitical map.

Currently, the country is experiencing great problems economically; it has to rebuild everything from scratch. But, I think, the situation in the spheres of culture and ideology is even more serious. There is a vacuum that is now being filled with a fantastic mixture of oriental religious elements and western technological culture, pirate videos of the lowest quality and the ideals of material welfare as a life's goal, search for the National Ideal and readiness to sell national property... The national culture couldn't even get up on its feet, when it was "knocked down" by the technically overwhelming Western ideological, informational and cultural machine.

Some legislative measures have already been taken in Kazakhstan which determine 50% of national language for broadcasting, but they are not enforced. Besides, their national security law prohibits foreign participation exceeding 20% in mass media. But there are a great number of cable TV channels with non-controlled programmes, which are available almost with every family. The mass media must help and spread different cultures and views, but not serve the strongest.

Special measures must be taken to protect the national info-cultural space. They should be worked out by both government and non-governmental organisations and should be assisted as much as possible. Each country's distinct culture must be given all the opportunities to develop and flourish and this must be the scientifically developed common strategy for developing countries.

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